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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, January 22, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "THE WINTER SALAD BOWL." Information from the Market Basket, by Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

I can remember the funny look on my mother's face years ago as she read a recipe for potato salad out of a cook-book one winter morning. "Place the salad on a bed of lettuce and serve."

"Now, where in the world shall I get lettuce in January?" she exclaimed. "Well, I guess we'll just have to do without it. Potato salad's good, bed or no bed of lettuce."

In later years I've known housewives to substitute a cabbage leaf or some watercress when lettuce was out of season. But today the problem would hardly arise, for we can buy lettuce throughout the winter in every large city and in many a crossroads store. It's sold wherever railroads and trucks bring the fresh vegetables grown in warm climates.

And that doesn't mean that winter lettuce is a luxury, for the price varies surprisingly little, summer and winter. For a fraction of a cent per leaf a family may have lettuce as the basis of the salad bowl the year around.

However, not all the lettuce leaves are worth the same in nutritive value. The other day I learned something from the Bureau of Home Economics that was definitely a surprise to me. I imagine it will be news to a good many other people, too, who are devotees of the salad bowl.

It seems that not long ago the Bureau undertook a study of the vitamin content of the green outer leaves of Iceberg lettuce, as compared with the bleached inner leaves. They found that the outer green leaves -- those we often trim off and throw away -- are the most valuable part of the lettuce in some ways! These deep green leaves are more than 30 times as rich in vitamin A as the pale greenish-white inside leaves. You remember that we have mentioned before the association of vitamin A with greenness in plants.

For vitamin B, the values in the Iceberg lettuce are the other way around; the bleached leaves are slightly richer. For vitamin C and vitamin G there is very little difference in the inner and outer leaves.

The moral, for the housewife, is to use all the head of lettuce possible. Sometimes the outer green leaves can be shredded and used in salads and sandwiches if they seem too coarse to be used whole, and are likely to be left uneaten on the plate.

Our national appetite for lettuce seems to be on the up-and-up. Just after the World War, in 1919, when it was still patriotic to eat plenty of fresh vegetables and salads, about eight thousand carloads of lettuce went to market. The next year, there was an increase of more than five thousand carloads, and a similar jump in commercial production in 1921 brought the rail shipments up to nearly nineteen thousand carloads. By 1936, almost fifty thousand carlots of lettuce went to market.

Where did it all come from? California has always been the heaviest producer of lettuce, and Arizona, in recent years, has held second place. But 15 States have a place in lettuce statistics, and local farmers and home gardeners in all States contribute an uncounted quota during the growing season.

The hard-headed western types generally called "Iceberg", have become increasingly popular for their crisp texture and tender leaves. Actually there are several varieties shipped from California and Arizona, but they are all sold as Iceberg and look much alike. Plant scientists have developed disease resisting strains which stand transportation well. They have also helped develop better methods of icing the cars that carry this perishable crop in good condition across the continent.

Other kinds of lettuce that are counted in the statistics are the Big Boston, a "butter" type that heads well; the May kind, and Salamander; also the Romaine or Cos type with long narrow stiff dark green leaves, and several non-heading sorts.

So much for the "bed of lettuce". What else will you have in your salad bowl? And by salad bowl I mean just that. The present vogue in many homes and restaurants is away from fancy salads, back to the bowl of assorted greens mixed on the table, Continental style, with a wooden fork and spoon. A tangy French dressing is generally preferred. It is made with two parts of oil to one of vinegar or lemon juice, seasoned to taste with salt, pepper, and paprika, and maybe a dash or two of sugar and tabasco.

I happen to like a trace of garlic in my French dressing. I usually rub the salad bowl around with a cut clove of garlic before mixing the salad, or else I keep a garlic button in the French dressing bottle. And I've found that crumbled Roquefort cheese gives a flavor that men, especially, like. I "toss" it with the greens and dressing in the salad bowl. Here's another suggestion: For the vinegar, use what's left in the mixed pickle bottle, possibly with some bits of chopped pickle still in it.

The combination of greens need never be twice alike. You can start with whatever is in season -- Iceberg, Boston head, or Romaine lettuce -- add some crisp, pungent endive or cress if available, and perhaps celery, shredded cabbage, chopped green pepper, a judicious quantity of chopped onion or its milder cousin chives, and even raw spinach. A few red radishes sliced crosswise are a good color note, and so are thin slices or grated flakes of raw carrot, or yellow turnip. Or slices of cooked beet.

Whatever the combination of ingredients, all the salad materials must be fresh and crisp. After washing the lettuce and other vegetables in cold water, wrap them in a cloth or put them in a covered, ventilated pan in a cold place until it is time to use them. Have them dry at the time of serving or they will make the dressing watery. If the salad is served from one big bowl, add the dressing the last minute. If served on individual salad plate, pass the dressing at the table.

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